

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

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INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR
AMEMBASSY JAKARTA
AMEMBASSY MANILA
AMEMBASSY TOKYO

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 SINGAPORE 1125

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PDIP, SN, ASEAN, TH
SUBJ: THAI PRIME MINISTER KRIANGSAK'S VISIT TO SINGAPORE

REF: (A) SINGAPORE 0939, (B) SINGAPORE 1029

1. SUMMARY. THAI PRIME MINISTER KRIANGSAK CHOMANAN AND
LARGE DELEGATION OF THAI OFFICIALS MADE OFFICIAL VISIT TO
SINGAPORE FEBRUARY 26-28. THE ATMOSPHERE IN MEETINGS,
AND PRESS COVERAGE, WAS FRIENDLY AND CORDIAL, WITH
KRIANGSAK'S PRAGMATIC AND MODERATE APPROACH RECEIVING
SPECIFIC PRAISE. IN ADDITION TO GENERAL EMPHASIS ON
STRENGTHENING ASEAN COOPERATION, VISIT RESULTED IN SPECIFIC
AGREEMENT TO FACILITATE FLOW OF THAI WORKERS TO SINGAPORE. END
SUMMARY.

2. KRIANGSAK'S SCHEDULE FOR HIS SINGAPORE VISIT INCLUDED
A FORMAL ARRIVAL CEREMONY; CALLS BY THE PRIME MINISTER AND
HIS WIFE ON PRESIDENT AND MRS. SHEARES AND PRIME MINISTER
AND MRS. LEE; DINNERS HOSTED BY PM LEE AND DEPUTY
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PM GOH KENG SWEE; AND A LUNCH BY THE MINISTER FOR
NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS, LIM KIM SAN.
KRIANGSAK ALSO VISITED THE PORT OF SINGAPORE AUTHORITY
AND ITS CONTAINER TERMINAL, THE MINISTRY OF NATIONAL
DEVELOPMENT, THE ROAD TRANSPORT ACTION COMMITTEE ON
AREA LICENSING (PRESUMABLY TO LOOK INTO SINGAPORE'S
QUITE SUCCESSFUL SCHEME FOR THE REDUCTION OF TRAFFIC

CONGESTION IN THE CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT), AND A WATER TREATMENT PLANT. MRS. VIRAT CHOMANAN ACCOMPANIED THE PRIME MINISTER ON CALLS AND SOCIAL ENGAGEMENTS; HER OWN SEPARATE SCHEDULE INCLUDED VISITS TO THE PARKS AND CHILD CARE FACILITIES IN THE JURONG INDUSTRIAL ESTATE, THE SINGAPORE HANDICRAFT CENTRE, AND THE NATIONAL JUNIOR COLLEGE AND SINGAPORE INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION. MOST SIGNIFICANT, THERE WERE TWO PRIVATE MEETINGS ATTENDED ONLY BY THE TWO PRIME MINISTERS.

3. THE ATMOSPHERE IN THE MEETINGS, AND THE VISIT AS A WHOLE, WERE DESCRIBED TO EMBOFFS BY THAI EMBASSY OFFICERS AS VERY GOOD, EXCEPTIONALLY WARM AND RECEPTIVE. THE THAI AMBASSADOR COMMENTED TO THE AMBASSADOR AT A LUNCHEON THAT KRIANGSAK IS STILL GETTING ESTABLISHED AND THAT SINGAPORE WANTS TO SUPPORT HIS POSITION AND WAS VERY ANXIOUS TO BE HELPFUL.

4. THE HEAD OF THE MFA POLITICAL DIVISION, TAN BOON SENG, TOLD THE DCM THAT SINGAPORE CONSIDERS THAILAND TO BE ASEAN'S FRONTLINE, THE MOST EXPOSED AND VULNERABLE OF THE ASEAN COUNTRIES. IN THE PAST, TAN SAID, SINGAPORE HAD HAD MISGIVINGS ABOUT THE ABILITY OF THAI GOVERNMENTS TO WITHSTAND DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN PRESSURES. KRIANGSAK'S APPOINTMENT AS PM HAD BEEN A MOST POSITIVE STEP, AS HE HAS PROVED FAR MORE FLEXIBLE
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AND PRAGMATIC THAN HIS PREDECESSOR. WHILE SINGAPORE STILL WORRIED ABOUT THAILAND, ESPECIALLY ITS ECONOMY, TAN FELT THAT THE PICTURE WAS CONSIDERABLY MORE PROMISING.

5. THESE ATTITUDES WERE ALSO REFLECTED IN PM LEE'S WELCOMING SPEECH AT THE FEBRUARY 26 DINNER IN KIRANGSAK'S HONOR, IN WHICH HE COMPLIMENTED GENERAL KRIANGSAK IN MAKING PROGRESS IN "PRAGMATIC ACCOMMODATION WITH THE NEW GOVERNMENTS OF LAOS, CAMBODIA, AND VIETNAM", AND IN EFFECTING "NATIONAL RECONCILIATION" INTERNALLY.

6. ONE CONCRETE AGREEMENT WAS REACHED DURING THE VISIT, AN AGREEMENT TO FACILITATE THE FLOW OF THAI WORKERS, LARGELY SKILLED WORKERS FOR THE SINGAPORE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY. THE JOINT COMMUNIQUE AND SUBSEQUENT EDITORIAL COMMENT PUT THIS AGREEMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COMPLEMENTARY ECONOMIC NEEDS OF THE TWO COUNTRIES: THAILAND'S TO REDUCE HIGH UNEMPLOYMENT AND SINGAPORE'S TO OBTAIN SKILLED WORKERS NEEDED FOR THE REPUBLIC'S ACTIVE CONSTRUCTION PROGRAM. (COMMENT: IN PRIVATE

DISCUSSIONS WITH GOS OFFICIALS, AND EVEN IN THE PRESS, THERE HAS BEEN FREQUENT MENTION OF THE RELUCTANCE OF SINGAPORE'S INCREASINGLY WELL-EDUCATED POPULATION TO ACCEPT MANUAL LABOR, SUCH AS CONSTRUCTION WORK. ALTHOUGH MALAYSIANS, AND TO SOME EXTENT INDONESIANS, HAVE INCREASINGLY BEEN FILLING SUCH JOBS, THERE SEEMS TO BE A FEELING THAT THAI WORKERS -- WHO WOULD HAVE NO LANGUAGE OR ETHNIC IDENTITY WITH SINGAPORE'S MALAY MINORITY -- MIGHT BE ESPECIALLY DESIRABLE AS TEMPORARY, AND APOLITICAL GUEST WORKERS.)

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7. ALTHOUGH AS MIGHT BE EXPECTED, ASEAN RECEIVED PRIMARY ATTENTION AS A REGIONAL BODY, KRIANGSAK SOMEWHAT SURPRISINGLY DESCRIBED SEATO AS "FULLY OPERATIVE" IN RESPONDING TO A QUESTION IN HIS FEBRUARY 28 PRESS CONFERENCE. STRESSING THAT "SEATO DOES NOT REPRESENT AN OBSTACLE IN THAILAND'S RELATIONS WITH OTHER COUNTRIES," HE DESCRIBED SEATO AS HAVING BENEFITTED THE COUNTRIES IN THE REGION AND HAVING DETERRED AGGRESSION, AND SAID THAT ALTHOUGH THE HEADQUARTERS IN BANGKOK HAD BEEN CLOSED, THE AGREEMENT HAD NOT BEEN ABANDONED AND HIS STILL FULLY OPERATIVE.

8. PRESS REPORTING AND COMMENT ON THE VISIT WAS EXTENSIVE AND FAVORABLE, WITH KRIANGSAK'S ARRIVAL GETTING HEADLINE TREATMENT. A STRAITS TIMES EDITORIAL PRIOR TO THE VISIT, AND A NEW NATION EDITORIAL ON ITS

CONCLUSION, COMMENTED ON THE DESIRABILITY OF GETTING DOWN TO "NITTY-GRITTY" COOPERATION WITHIN THE OVERSALL ASEAN FRAMEWORK, AND BOTH NOTED THAT IT WAS GOOD TIMING ON THE PART OF KRIANGSAK TO VISIT HIS ASEAN NEIGHBORS
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PRIOR TO HIS VISIT TO PEKING.

9. THAI EMBASSY OFFICIALS APPEAR TO HAVE SOMEWHAT DIFFERING VIEWS ON THE STRENGTH OF GENERAL KIRANGSAK'S DOMESTIC POLITICAL POSITION, AS EVIDENCED BY THEIR COMMENTS ON THE VISIT. WHILE THE THAI AMBASSADOR DESCRIBED THE GENERAL AS "STILL GETTING ESTABLISHED", ANOTHER EMBASSY OFFICER COMMENTED PRIVATELY THAT THE PRESENCE OF SO MANY POWERFUL MEN IN THE DELEGATION (SPECIFICALLY THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS, GENERAL SURAKIT MAIYALAP; THE DEPUTY MINISTER OF THE INTERIOR, GENERAL PREM TINSULANON; AND THE DEPUTY COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE ROYAL THAI ARMY, GENERAL YOT THEP-HATSADIN NA AYUTTHAYA. THE THAI AMBASSADOR COMMENTED TO THE AMBASSADOR THAT THERE WAS UNHAPPINESS AMONG THE THAI MILITARY THAT KRIANGSAK WAS PAYING SO MUCH ATTENTION TO GENERALS YOT AND PREM.

10. IN SUMMARY, THE GOS HAS LONG BEEN ESPECIALLY CONCERNED ABOUT THAILAND AND HAS CONSIDERED ITS INTERNAL SITUATION FAR FROM SATISFACTORY. THE GOS HAS BEEN RELIEVED BY THE MODERATE, PRAGMATIC COURSE KRIANGSAK HAS BEEN TAKING, AND SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN FURTHER REASSURED BY THE VISIT. WITH THE CONDITION OF THE THAI ECONOMY OF SOME CONCERN TO THE GOS, SOME OF THE SPECIFIC MEASURES OF COOPERATION (SUCH AS JOINT VENTURES IN LABOR INTENSIVE INDUSTRIES IN THAILAND AND THE PROPOSED FLOW OF THAI WORKERS IN SINGAPORE) APPEAR DESIGNED TO GIVE PRACTICAL ASSISTANCE TO RELIEVE SUCH PROBLEMS IN THAILAND AS UNEMPLOYMENT.
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